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THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE LAFAYETTES. BY EDITH SICHEL. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1910.

Miss Sichel's volume is an interesting example of a variety of biography which the English, in recent years, have carried to a high degree of perfection, a variety that is not precisely a memoir, nor a history, nor a novel. Alternately, or simultaneously, it seems to partake of all these diverse characters. It is the nearest approximation that can be made to a work of fiction without becoming one entirely. Even when the facts are correctly stated, the atmosphere enveloping them seems to be generated by the imagination. There is an intimacy of treatment which can ordinarily only be expected of the novelist, with his immediate insight into the springs of action. This new class of writers present their subject with all the vivid light of contemporary observation rather than with the sober coloring of historical retrospection. The explanation of this attitude, which so often results in delightful, but not so often in trustworthy, writing, is obvious: the biographer's aim is really to amuse, and not to instruct. If he seeks to convey a moral, it is a form that will be palatable to the most frivolous taste. He is aware that his work has no solid value as history, and yet that it is not unadulterated fiction. Released from all serious historical obligations, his one purpose is to make the time pass pleasantly for the reader; and in this he is generally successful.

Miss Sichel has portrayed with true feminine sympathy and intuition the lives of the female members of the Lafayette household, who were among the loveliest and most pious women of their time. There is a notable delicacy in her treatment of their characters; occasionally a soft and lurking humor; always a vivid perception of their peculiarities, which brings them up very clearly before us.

She has not been so happy in her delineation of Lafayette himself. But this may be the fault of the man. The hero of two worlds was, in some aspects of his character, one of the unintelligible figures of history. What were the qualities which enabled him to play so distinguished a part in three revolutions, and yet never to seem really great? Was his European career almost entirely the result of the glamour of his American? And would he have become so conspicuous in the American Revolution had he offered himself to Washington in the beginning as an unknown young soldier of fortune? A youthful Frenchman of the highest social rank, of large wealth, of powerful interest at court, who had romantically defied every obstacle in his way to rush to the patriots' assistance, such a man might confidently count on a warm reception when he presented himself in the American camp. The personal qualities of the youthful officer—his ardor, energy, and courage—confirmed his inherited claim to a prominent place, and worthily maintained it to the closing scene of Yorktown.

There was nothing in his bearing or actions during his American campaigns to foreshadow Cromwell-Grandson, to which double Mirabeau inaptly likened him afterward. He appears rather as the gay-hearted, debonair, polite, vivid, yet earnest and chivalrous young soldier who won the respect and affection of all who were thrown in his society. Undoubtedly his early prominence in the French Revolution was due to the unique reputation which he had achieved in America, and his association thereby, in the popular mind, with Republican ideals; but he proved himself incapable of stemming the tide, even before it had begun to run very strongly.

Perhaps no one could have done it. Lafayette certainly could not and did not; and, but for his opportune flight, would have perished on the scaffold. More fortunate than Dumouriez, because clapped into prison by the enemies of the Republic, he was permitted to return to France after his release. His Republican spirit, however, was too unbending for him to accept the Napoleonic military despotism as a substitute for the liberal form of government which he preferred; and, in consequence, he remained inactive and neglected throughout the imperial supremacy. Emerging from his obscurity, which had continued during the reigns of both Louis XVIII. and Charles X., he took the leading part in establishing the rule of the citizen-king, and then withdrew, finally, to his country home.

Not to be seduced from the principles which he had learned at the feet of Washington in the atmosphere of the western world, Lafayette nevertheless remained always greater in character than in action. For action in its highest form he was not really fitted, owing to a certain inflexibility of temperament and to an incapacity to control men in large bodies.

LECTURES ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. By LORD ACTON. New York and London: Macmillan Company, 1910.

The vast learning of Lord Acton is displayed in this memorable volume, not in expansion, as in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, or Buckle's *History of Civilization*, but in extreme compression. In pregnancy and compactness, he recalls Bacon—only he does not permit himself, like either Bacon or Hume, to diverge far into the train of historical reflections suggested by the facts with which he is dealing. The present work has the serious fault which sententiousness is apt to create—it is often obscure, not from the use of inexact language (something foreign to Lord Acton), but from the statement of a fact in a form so brief that it assumes some of the faintness of a generalization. This fault is intensified by the author's taking it for granted that the reader is familiar with the history of the French Revolution even to its minutest particulars. The most profound knowledge of that great event is absolutely necessary to an intelligent understanding of these pages. An important scene is sometimes presented in a single sentence; a mighty popular tendency treated in two. To the reader only partially equipped by previous study to grasp the full meaning of the descriptions and the conclusions much of the volume will seem vague and shadowy. The Revolution glimmers, as it were, behind a veil.

There is nothing to recall the terrific dramatic force of Carlyle's companion masterpiece in this work. Carlyle seized upon a few facts only, but his imagination was able to use them with such power that the whole spirit, the concentrated essence, of the French Revolution is brought vividly before us. Lord Acton, on the other hand, seizes upon many facts; and, as it were, by the blows of another Thor, compresses them into a narrow compass, to the exclusion of all imaginative effects. The work seems rather like the head-lines of a professor's thesis than the actual thesis itself: memoranda strung together connectedly, but intended for future elaboration; a skeleton outline to be clothed with flesh by word of mouth in the lecture-room.

To Americans, the most interesting part of the volume will be the description which the writer gives of the influence of the American Revolution on